

UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
MUSEUM



ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims
Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Library respects the copyright and intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection. The Library holds the rights and permissions to put this material online. If you hold an active copyright to this work and would like to have your materials removed from the web please contact the USHMM Library by phone at 202-479-9717, or by email at digital_library@ushmm.org.

MY STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

1940 / 45

by

OSCAR LICHTENSTERN

This report does not correspond totally with the original text written in concentration camp. I purposely toned it down substantially, because I do not want to arouse feelings of revenge and pity, but mainly I want to portray my thoughts and feelings of the last years.

I dedicate this report to all relatives and friends who demonstrated so very many tokens of friendship and sympathy upon our return.

(No date available)

There may be some inconsistencies in this report but I translated everything literally as well as I could without changing the content.

Some commentary between parentheses are literally translated from the original German version, other commentary I have added for clarification.

Ruth Lichtenstern Fishman
(Grandaughter of Oscar Lichtenstern)
February 1992

The idea to keep a journal in which to record the most important events in general, as well as my personal experiences, occurred to me already at the outbreak of the war in 1939. However, the implementation did not take place, because I believed, like most of my fellow Jews and fellow victims, that we in Holland would only be idle spectators looking onto the developing drama. When it turned out to be that this opinion was erroneous and events raged so fast and with such intensity, I was not able to execute my good intentions. Besides, the possession of such a journal would have been too dangerous with constant house searches taking place.

Only after I arrived in Theresienstadt after an 8 months incarceration in the Dutch Camp Westerbork, and I had calmed down a bit, I finally did what I intended to do, namely, I started to write down the past events as accurately as possible and arrange these events chronologically. The journal brought me joy, it replaced a friend to whom I could tell everything unembellished.

Thus I was even more grieved when I discovered on Xmas eve 1944, during one of our many moves, that my diary, which by now was of considerable size, had disappeared and in spite of all searching, remained missing. This loss had a second aspect, namely that if it had fallen in the wrong hands I easily could have expected great difficulties, because I often was very sharp in my criticism and called a spade a spade and did not mince words. For a while I vacillated between accepting the loss and living from day to day, come what may, or if I should consider trying to reconstruct the past.

Eventually the need to express myself triumphed and the thought that perhaps one of my friends abroad, or my son living in England, might have the desire to learn what I and my wife experienced. After all, one doesn't know today if the future will not be more eventful than the past. Thus I will try to depict the most important events, being aware of the fact that I have already forgotten a lot, whereas other occurrences - namely those that happened years ago in Amsterdam - I can only remember indistinctly, because since that time too many other impressions have invaded my mind.

On May 9, 1940, the evening before the outbreak of the war between Holland and Germany, we went with Heinz and Margret by car to the shore, and we noticed that we were stopped several times and had to show our papers and were forced a couple of times to turn off the headlights of the car. In the numerous restaurants there was no electric light, only candles; basically only military persons were present, yet the sophisticated life went on. When we asked questions, we were told that it all was a military exercise to determine if all would run smoothly in case of a real incident.

We returned home about midnight and went to bed immediately. We had hardly fallen asleep when we were awakened by loud explosions and howling sirens. We made a run for the window, saw burning airplanes crash down, listened to the radio news and learned that war had broken out between the powerful Germany and the

unprepared Holland. It lasted 5 days, the uneven but exasperatingly fought battle, during which time we were not allowed to leave the house.

After that, the horrible bombardment of Rotterdam followed and the threat that the same would be done to other cities; and Holland, that had waited in vain for help from France or England, had to capitulate.

On May 15, 1940, the day on which the Germans invaded Amsterdam, we had to decide whether we should stay on or should try to leave the country, which at that time period was still possible. But the reports of those who had made the attempt was so disheartening that we decided to remain.

At the shore mass confusion already prevailed which was accelerated by severely increased German bombardments, and the anchored boats in general did not want to depart. With these events a period of suffering began - the duration and intensity of which we could not imagine at this point in time. The invasion of the Germans caused a general strike, which immediately was crushed and blood was spilled.

Shortly thereafter the German civilian authorities appeared and they began immediately establishing Jewish laws. The Jews were forbidden to use any public transportation; theaters, movies, cafe's and restaurants were not allowed to be entered; they were not to appear on the streets after 8 p.m., etc. Shopping time for Jews was reduced to 2 hours daily; vegetables and fruit were not allowed to be purchased by Jews; meat was only obtainable via Jewish butchers and a gentile barber could not service Jewish clients.

Radios of Jewish households were confiscated, as well as gold, silver and jewelry items and one had to submit a precise inventory of assets which later on were totally confiscated. Personal identification papers of Jews were marked with the letter J and the Jewish star, which had to be sewn on one's clothing, was introduced.

Highly appreciated was the attitude of a large part of the Dutch population who showed their compassion and sympathy towards the Jews, in spite of the fact that it often was to their own disadvantage. Soon the "razzien" (round ups) in the streets and in the houses were introduced where Jews were hunted down like wild animals. One could see scared Jews climbing on roofs from which they were brutally pulled down by the Germans.

Time and time again I was stopped on the street, but because of an identification card stating that I was part of the Jewish council and a stamp of the German authority identifying me as temporarily exempted from forced labor, I was released.

The people who were apprehended during the raids were brought to a former theatre building "as they were" in order to be transported in large troops to Westerbork, which meanwhile had been transformed into a transit camp. Furniture and all other items in their homes were immediately seized and shipped to Germany

by trucks. Only someone who has gone through it personally can feel what it means to lose everything from one minute to the next, to leave one's home and to face a fearful future.

The Jewish council in Amsterdam, of which Heinz was an advisory member, was recognized by the German authorities as the official representation of the Jews and without doubt this council executed many good deeds, but intrinsically had very little backbone so that eventually it became just an instrument of executive structure for the Germans.

The president of the Jewish council was a Dutch university professor, a senile unsophisticated man who did not hide the fact that he had little sympathy for his German fellow Jews and only represented the interests of the Dutch Jews and even these interests were barely perceived. The relationship between the Dutch and German Jews was not good, which was not too astonishing since the two factions had totally contrasting opinions.

As of 8 p.m. all Jews had to stay indoors and that was the worst time for them. Every doorbell, every marching footstep in the street were cause for nervousness, because one feared daily and hourly one's own round up and deportation and everyone had, in case of emergency, the most important items ready packed in a rucksack (back pack) and was prepared for come what may.

We lived in a small "pension" (rooming house) from April 1, 1942 until August 1942 when the owners were rounded up and sent to Poland. Heinz insisted that we move in with him, because that way he could furnish us with better protection, and we rented a day room in the neighborhood in order not to bother the children constantly. Meanwhile, Heinz had to exchange his big apartment for a modest one, because Jews were only allowed a monthly income of Fl. 250-.

The first "razzia" (round up) occurred on a Saturday and was later on referred to as the Mauthausen razzia. It took place with unbelievable sadism and we were introduced to the concept of deportation. The first victims were symbols, they were not singled out by age or occupation, they were not part of any list, their only misfortune was that they were Jewish.

On Feb. 25, 1941, to protest the inhuman treatment of the Jews, a spur-of-the-moment strike erupted in Amsterdam which was unmercifully bludgeoned. At this occasion 700 young Jews were deported to Mauthausen and each and every one was murdered. Shortly thereafter their parents received a printed notice that their child was shot whilst escaping.

During this time period I learned to hate all that was German and I made it a point to remember the words of the wife of a German official in order to revenge myself when the hour for retaliation would chime. This woman said to a Gentile acquaintance "I could peacefully watch if they would drench the Jews in gasoline

and light a match to them." That is how the German people felt in those days, and that is how most German men and women thought, and that is how this nation sealed its fate, because hopefully the allied forces will not once again repeat their mistake of 1918, but instead act according to the old biblical proverb "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth".

That's how life proceeded, more for worse than for better, until Sunday June 20, 1943, when in the early morning hours the town quarter which had been designated as a Jewish ghetto was surrounded by the dreaded "Green police" and the SS troops. The Jews were hoarded into the streets, were only allowed to take the most necessary prepacked things and were assembled on a large square, including Jenny and myself. Heinz and his family temporarily escaped this fate because he possessed the proper stamp.

After waiting for hours in the very hot sun we were transported by trolley car to a suburban station and from there we were further transported in cattle cars which held 60 people for an 8 hour trip to Westerbork. On that particular day and the day thereafter 6,000 Jews were deported in this manner out of Amsterdam.

We arrived in Westerbork at 8 p.m. and only the following morning at 8 a.m. were we finished with the admission formalities whereby the SS soldiers brutally took away our money, valuables, fountain pens, etc. The waiting period we spent in an open field. Then men and women were separated and lodged in wooden barracks which each contained about 1,000 persons and were over crowded.

Around this time period Westerbork contained a population of about 18,000 people. In many cases 2 people slept in one bed without a mattress on the bare metal strips without a blanket. There were always 3 beds on top of each other (triple deckers), chairs and tables were non existent.

Every Friday mass transports left for Poland and in the preceeding night the names of the participants were called out, and terrible scenes took place. People only had little time to prepare for the voyage and only could take few belongings. Time and time again suicide attempts took place during those nights, mostly with Veronal (sleeping pill), and they were partly successful.

The worst sights were those of the seriously ill persons who were carried on stretchers from the hospital to the train; they had to partake in the voyage but mostly died en route. Horrible scenes took place, the SS was brutal.

The transport cars for the train arrived already the preceeding day - always the same old French cattle cars. Every sealed car contained a small water barrel and a large barrel for releasing physical needs. Travelers sat body to body on top of their few belongings and were en route for several days. Authentic reports describing these transports are not available since nobody lived to talk about it.

Heinz was still in Amsterdam and took care of us by sending food parcels and thusly somehow one got used to this wretched life. In the mornings we were given imitation coffee, in the afternoon a "one-dish-meal", meaning some sort of vegetable with potatoes which was supposed to be stew, and at night nothing but tea. Once in a while we got a little butter or jam. It was scanty, but one could just about exist.

After having been in a camp for a while, one learned to make do with extremely little room, with extremely few things and with extremely little food. There were times I could carry all my worldly possessions on my flat hands; but that was not so bad, much worse was the lack of free will and the constant fear of being sent to Poland.

During that time we also lost our dear Jenny Merzbach who was sent on a Polish transport. A few weeks afterwards Heinz initiated a metal industry in Westerbork which dealt with the splitting of old cables, batteries and the peeling of aluminum foil and the salvaged materials were shipped back to be used by the Dutch industry. The main reason for this arrangement was to purposely occupy a large number of Jews and to keep them, by this means, in Westerbork. This plan proved successful as the plant was started with 30 men and toward the end consisted of 1500 people. I worked in this outfit 10 hours a day and the work banished my dark thoughts.

As time progressed I got an insight into the inner workings of the camp and was shocked about the corruption which took place in the most important Jewish organizations. For example, one could protect oneself for a long time against a transport to Poland if one had the necessary cash. Whilst the greatest part of the camp inhabitants suffered from hunger, these functionaries feasted in a most shameful manner, but let their parents die of hunger in Theresienstadt as I found out later.

Due to his activities, Heinz received a certificate from the camp commander in order to go in and out of the camp at any time. I myself became part of a special list and was supposed to stay in the camp till the end.

Whilst in camp I received a Red Cross letter from my nephew in Tel Aviv with the news that my oldest sister had died towards the end of the previous year. I couldn't answer that letter. In November 1943 I caught pneumonia, stayed 6 weeks in the hospital and Jenny furnished me with needed extra food. Heinz also visited me many times and brought me all sorts of goodies. After my discharge I moved from the large barrack to a small room, Jenny next door, and living conditions were comparatively good.

Mid February 1944 Heinz and family appeared suddenly in Westerbork, after they had been interned several weeks in the old theatre in Amsterdam. They were treated with priviledges, received their own room and Heinz's certificate kept its validity. At Heinz's suggestion I was allowed a service trip to Amsterdam, but the

noise of the big city and the constant check points put a damper on my stay, so that all in all I was glad to go back.

In Westerbork we also had a newspaper, the J.P.A. (Jewish Press Agency); however it was never printed, but instead news circulated from mouth to mouth and was mostly ahead of the happenings; yet 1 to 2 weeks later the events which had been circulated by the J.P.A. did indeed happen. Therefore, these rumors manifested themselves as premature births of the truth.

We also had an operetta group, including some well known artists, and the camp commander showed his interest by his many visits, during which he felt like a messenger of life and death. He let the artists perform until their time had come to be transported. It often happened that theatre company members still sang their merry songs in the evening and only a few hours later would be on their way to Poland and their deaths.

One got used to this condition and hoped from one week to the next to be able to remain. To my great horror, Jenny and I were called for the transport leaving for Theresienstadt on Feb. 25, 1944 and Heinz couldn't do anything about it due to unfortunate circumstances. I set out on this trip with great expectations, because it was preached over and over again that Theresienstadt would be a paradise. The transport consisted of 850 people and we traveled, not like the Poland transports in cattle cars, but in regular 3rd class train compartments. The trip lasted 26 hours; provisions only consisted of 1/2 bread per person, otherwise nothing, not even water, yet nevertheless we suffered no short comings because we had stocked up sufficiently before our departure.

At our arrival in Theresienstadt we were very disappointed, the welcome by the Czech police and the SS was depressing. We had to leave all our belongings on the platform and, like animals, we were herded into small cells in a barrack where we had to wait for hours, body to body, without the possibility for a drink of water, to freshen up or to stretch out. Then we were guided one by one into a hall where all our valuables were taken away, tobacco, fountain pens, etc. and then we had to undress completely to be thoroughly examined.

The risk of smuggling was enormous, because whoever was caught was put in jail and was automatically sent to Poland in the next transport. In spite of that fact, Jenny and I dared to smuggle 400 Marks sewn into our clothing, which later on, when we waited in vain for care packages from Heinz, proved very useful. We had to wait 10 days to get our luggage back and during that time period we slept in our clothing, as it was very cold, in wooden beds with "mattresses" made out of wood chips. The suitcases were returned and had been vandalized and most of the contents were gone.

Officially I have stopped to have a name; I am now number XXIV/4-389, one's name is only valid in private life.

The site gave the impression of a dying community, it reeked everywhere of decomposition, and people and houses looked very ill kept. The first impression was so wretched that one had the feeling that one could not possibly live here for any length of time, and one longed for Westerbork.

The ghetto was hardly 1 square kilometer, consisted of 5 streets running north/south and 7 streets running east/west and in this area, at times, up to 60,000 Jews were housed and an even bigger number of rats, mice, bed bugs and similar coinhabitants. Thusly, it is not surprising that at the peak of the summers epidemics broke out and many people died, all the more so as in the beginning there was a lack of the most basic hygenic availabilities.

When we arrived about 36,000 Jews were housed in Theresienstadt. Shortly after our arrival I found out that R. A. Cohn from Duisberg also was present. I visited him in a hospital and was shocked at his appearance. On one eye he already was blind, the other eye was strongly diseased and his body was only skin and bones. In spite of that he was optimistic. I gave him some of our provisions that we had brought along and had to gently force him to accept them since he did not want to take anything due to modesty. On my 3rd or 4th visit I was told by the nurse that R. A. Cohn had died 2 days previously because of weakness and he was cremated the day after.

Funerals here were a mass production - about 30-50 people at one time - and it left a horrible impression. The coffins were loaded on trucks by the dozens, then one could walk about 300 paces behind the truck, which then drove at high speed to the crematorium in order to be able to pick up the next load.

One saw many blind people, many people with severe war injuries, but one also encountered many acquaintances. Thusly, aside from R. A. Cohn, I also found my old fraternity brother Dr. Ernst Keller, from Vienna, whom I hadn't seen since 1915 but whom I recognized immediately; furthermore, my cousin Dr. Oscar Freudenfeld from Bruenn (hadn't seen him in 50 years), my old sergeant major friend from World War I and a whole bunch of acquaintances from Thorn, Cologne, Amsterdam and Westerbork.

Unfamiliar for us, but a pleasant surprise after the dull existence in Westerbork, was the active intellectual life in Theresienstadt which did house a great many intellectuals. Theatre, music, all kinds of lectures and other events in every way, shape or form were held in primitive halls and alternated with all kinds of sports events and were for us, in a Jewish camp, a very amazing new experience.

The community center housed the main leisure office department which was in charge of all arrangements. There also was a self administered Jewish bank which issued bills from K 1.-- to K 100.-- value (K stands for Kronen). Every working inhabitant received K 200.-- monthly and every non-working inhabitant received K 50.-- monthly. One could buy old things in the shops in the ghetto, for instance old

clothing, shoes, underwear, but also used combs and toothbrushes, etc. A civilized human being can hardly imagine such things; but as time went on one got used to it, in spite of the fact that it was known that these items came from the deceased population.

Sometimes one could also get one's hands on provisions, only they were rather useless since the only items available were mustard, "bread spread" (ingredients being mustard, onion and vinegar), several spices and once in a while dried vegetables or Maggi (Worcester sauce).

A cafe also existed where one could buy a cup of imitation coffee with sugar substitute at K 2.-- and sometimes one could listen to music. The library consisted of several thousands of books and could be used without fees.

Aside from the delousing bath, there also was a general bathhouse and a small bathtub for sick people. The accommodations were bad, we lived - men and women separated - in the Hamburger barracks in overcrowded rooms together with disagreeable people. For 3,000 people there were only 3, and sometimes only 2, washrooms available, where men and women had to wash simultaneously. I arose at 5 o'clock in the mornings in order to wash up in peace and quiet. One had to conquer one's repulsion to use the toilets. I had to defecate whilst standing. It was forbidden to teach the children, but it was done secretly anyway. Very nearby a notorious "K.Z." prison was located, the so called "Kleine Festung" (little fortress) where it was easy to enter but difficult to ever get out. Unlucky individuals were treated inhumanely by the SS troops. Here many thousand Jews were executed and shot without any kind of trial whatsoever.

Our care was poor and insufficient, but in the beginning we still had some of our supplementary provisions that we had brought along. Until autumn we never saw any fruit or vegetables, never butter or jam, but only got 1/2 loaf of bread every 3rd day and a very little bit of margarine. One could buy a loaf of bread for M 15--, however, during transport time the cost multiplied. The menu consisted of black imitation coffee (bitter) in the mornings, watery soup (mostly uneatable) and a few boiled potatoes with onion sauce at lunch time, and at night again watery soup or imitation coffee.

Before falling asleep at night I had hunger visions of food and imagined eating a rich mutton roast with the juices dripping from my lips. One's body revolted against the total lack of fat, vitamin and egg white and the result was a mean diarrhea which weakened the patient. Like in Westerbork the cigarette, so here currency was measured in bread and there were established rules and regulations for trading - for example 1 bar razor soap equaled 1 loaf of bread, 1 large tin of vegetables equaled 2-1/2 loaves, etc.

What was called "organizing" in Westerbork, here was called "sluicing" meaning acquiring something, but by no means stealing. One organized, that is to say sluiced

everything; wood, coal, any useful object - in other words anything and everything that was not immovable. But anybody would have vehemently denied if he would have been accused of theft.

I worked in an office until I became sick and the doctor didn't permit me to work at all. In the beginning of May 1944 it became common knowledge that a Red Cross Committee would be arriving for an inspection and about 10,000 Jews were used to enhance the town. The dilapidated houses, as far as they were located on the route that this committee would take, got a face lift, thousands of bushes and little trees were planted, the old market place, which earlier on had been a wood and crate storage facility, was changed into a park with a music pavillion and even street signs were placed so that one could not get lost going to the bathhouse, the post office or the library. In the music pavillion concerts were taking place daily and when one was lucky one could enjoy a concert sitting down.

In April 1944, the Hamburger barracks were emptied and Jenny was moved to the top floor in the Dresdner barracks and I moved to the top floor in the Hannover barracks; both of us got our rations in the Magdeburger barracks. Our "dinner" was eaten in the courtyard standing in the rain. I was ill, often couldn't manage to climb the 72 steps to my lodgings and Jenny had to bring me my food. On my floor there were no beds. We slept on the stone floor rolled in our blanket and were eaten alive by bedbugs. I was particularly unlucky, the roof over my head had a leak and when it rained I had to crawl under an umbrella in order not to be swept away in a puddle. In this manner we existed for 6 long weeks, the worst weeks we had experienced thus far.

In June 1944, another miserable period occurred. Within 3 days, 3 transports, each containing 2,500 Jews - 7,500 all together - were being shoved off to Poland in sealed cattle cars. The shipping and the procedure took place in a most brutal manner as the SS beat the innocent men, women and children with sticks. One got a premonition what sort of treatment these people would receive during the trip and at their final destination. In this respect, one SS man called Heindel, especially distinguished himself: he was one of the murderers of Dollfuss. During this time period, Dr. Eppstein, the Jewish senior council member, was beaten by the camp commander in such a manner that he couldn't work for days.

The many kilometers surrounding the fortress were being developed by Jewish hands into vegetable fields which became a blessing for the entire community when in the fall the harvest was being used for improved and more variable nourishment. During the entire summer the food situation was so skimpy that we were hungry every day, after the provisions that we had brought along were finished.

The expected packages from Heinz, which we were so longing for, first didn't arrive at all and then when they did come little by little the contents were totally spoiled due to the long shipping period and the heat, and with bleeding hearts we had to throw everything out. Around this time period I suffered from severe hunger pains,

which were acknowledged by the doctor who couldn't do anything about it. In those days we exchanged anything and everything we could miss for bread and I was introduced to a new delicacy - dry toast (bread roasted on top of a potbellied black stove heater). I suffered from depressions which were caused by physical as well as mental conditions. Jenny was a great help, without her I couldn't have pulled through.

As soon as the beautification of the town was more or less finished, a film week was initiated which one had to take with a sense of humor. They filmed an outdoor concert, a special performance concert in the community center, a command dance evening, etc.; all this for a propaganda movie entitled "Theresienstadt amuses itself". They also shot live movies. Lots of people were ordered to the post office and had to pretend to pick up parcels and orders were given to smile. One particular afternoon 3,000 young people were ordered to appear for an outdoor cabaret performance. Whilst guarded by the SS troops, they had to walk around for hours, then had to pose in a meadow attending a show which they had to applaud with happy faces. The fact that camp commander Rahn was hidden in nearby bushes, ready to use his riding crop on those who were not merry enough, the photographer seemingly forgot to film.

A second film called "Theresienstadt goes to work" showed several groups of people representing agriculture, industry, delivery, cleaning etc. with the tools of their trades. The Jewish film actor Geron was the director of this endeavor operating under the supervision of the German authorities and if things did not proceed fast enough, the SS soldiers encouraged the operation in their own manner of style. Kurt Geron and the camp commander had a good relationship. By playing the Judas, he received better food and had his own room. But when his task was completed, he also was transported to Poland because he knew too much. One film unfortunately, was not produced however. And that film could have been titled "Hunger in Theresienstadt" and would have been the most successful of all. In order to produce that picture, one only would have had to show the food distribution and the scenes which daily took place near the kitchen where people got into fights over the garbage. Potato peels, moldy vegetables, etc. were much sought after.

At last the long awaited committee arrived, but it was by no means international because it was mainly comprised of Germans, Danes and one Swiss Red Cross representative. The committee was shown Potemkin-like villages including speeches and rehearsed shows by prompted children, etc. The children were trained in such manner that, in front of the gentlemen of the committee, they had to address the detested camp commander as "uncle" and had to ask him "uncle, will you come back tomorrow to play with us?" or "do we have to eat sardines again tomorrow?" But a coincidence did happen whereby one of the Danish committee members recognized an old acquaintance and told him "you needn't say anything, your face tells me how you all are doing here". The committee would have had to be blind not to see that all was freshly fixed up. During the few days that the committee stayed in the camp we received more and better food, and we were sad when they drove off.

A severe, but righteous do-it-yourself justice was served in the case of several newly arrived Jews from Berlin, who had informed the police that they harbored hidden Jews in order to collect a reward. These informers were so severely beaten by their victims that they had to be admitted to the hospital, more dead than alive. The O.D. (police force keeping order) stood by and took care that all occurred in orderly fashion; the doctors in the ambulance refused to help.

All summer long I didn't feel well and Jenny had to put up with me, because for a while I wasn't even able to cross the street.

On September 6, 1944 Heinz with his family accompanied by over 2,000 other people, arrived in the VIIth Holland transport. We had arrived with transport IV at the time. At his arrival Heinz was informed by some idiot that his mother was doing all right, but that his father had recently died. Of course he was very upset and only calmed down when I could show myself from afar. In the beginning he and Margret had difficulties to get used to things, they had been spoiled in Westerbork. Both had to work hard, Heinz as a stoker and porter in a German barrack, Margret as a member of the stoker's gang in the mica mineral department. Margret had to rise at 2:30 a.m. and worked from 3 - 7 a.m. and also 3 hours in the afternoon. The people on the VII Holland transport were treated miserably by the authorities. Only after 3 weeks did the people get to see their blankets and backpacks; suitcases never showed up and all the belongings contained in the suitcases were confiscated. Heinz especially regretted the loss of a particular heavy suitcase with food which would have lasted for many weeks for all of us.

During the time span from Sept. 28 till Oct. 28, 1944, exactly 30 days, no less than 12 transports with about 25,000 people were deported from here to Poland. During the 3rd transport, Heinz was called up in the evening hours to depart for Poland the following day. We knew that no one could do anything about it and spent a horrible night.

The next day Heinz went to the German council, showed them his passport from Paraguay and his name was removed from the list. In those days the young and the old, the healthy and the sick, men, women and children all left, and it was impossible to determine if any and if so, what kind of system was used for these choices. One time it was an all male transport, another time only females, sometimes only the sick, mostly people with TBC (tuberculosis), and we knew that they would be gassed. Also lame people on crutches or in little carts, blind people; yet also young strong persons at the height of their strength or all the orphans - in short no category of people were safe and the population of Theresienstadt was reduced by one tenth during this month.

Once again, like so often previously, one could notice an almost childlike optimism of the Dutch Jews, which they held on to despite all disappointments. Just as they had counted on an invasion and liberation during the past month of May, they now

were totally convinced that the war could only last another few days, possibly a few weeks. They all counted on the fact to be able to go home within 4 weeks. Shortly before these transports took place, the senior Jewish council member, Dr. Eppstein, was arrested and was never seen again. Dr. Murmelstein from Vienna, his deputy, was appointed successor. With the last transport Margret's parents also departed and up to this day I don't know why we were so blessed to avoid this destiny. Most people lost their nerves during this period. Daily one was awaiting one's own deportation, saw one's friends leave and witnessed goodbyes between husband and wives or between parents and children - scenes that one will never ever forget. These familiar scenes were repeated, whereby the transport members were beaten mercilessly and herded like animals into the railroad cattle cars. When these transports ceased, the ghetto looked substantially different. Streets were desolate, the stores and cafe and all activities created by the leisure department were closed and stopped due to the lack of staff; the ghetto seemed deserted.

It was rumored that due to this severe depletion, the work age would be raised from 65 to 70 and whoever couldn't or wouldn't work in this age group would be placed in a hospital for the terminally ill which meant the same as a sure soon goodbye for Poland. In order to avoid such destiny, I reported for work of my own free will in spite of doctor's orders and I was placed in domestic service. I had to shovel coal, lug potatoes in wheelbarrows and move heavy furniture up and down stairways - in short I was a houseboy and I didn't care for that at all.

I went to the employment department, where mostly Czech people worked, talked to them in their native tongue, which I also spoke, and eventually was able to choose a job from their "wanted" list. I chose a position as house manager, because not only did that provide extra food, but also a room of one's own. Thus I became manager of building L313, Jenny became my assistant, and we had to take care of about 50 rooms, which however were empty at the time. The building and the rooms were in a deplorable condition, but with courage and faith I started to work, firstly the preparation of our own room.

Dec. 24, 1944. Today's move went smoothly since I already had dragged most things beforehand. It is freezing, like I haven't experienced in 25 years, but our room is warm since there are enough coals available in the cellar and my conscience doesn't bother me if I burn tables, bureaus and chairs. Fetching the food is no great pleasure; one has to stand outside in line for long periods of time and await one's turn. I go to the doctor who gives me a Strophantin injection like I got in the summer and which benefitted me for months. Jenny has a severe intestinal inflammation and has to be on a diet - which here means no food. I polish her portions off as well and since Heinz gave me a present of a food coupon and the district elder gave me another spare coupon, I now eat at noon no less than 3-1/2 portions and at night 3 portions, which however is not difficult.

The enemy aircraft activities seem to be quite strong because we now have air raids several times daily.

Dec. 25, 1944. The holidays promise to be good. Heinz brought 2 cigars to me today which I smoked with great relish after a 10 months abstinence. I now get a Strophanthin injection every other day and I do my job even though the doctor advised me in no uncertain terms to stay in bed.

Dec. 31, 1944. New Years eve. How we used to party and celebrate this night in our younger years. In spite of the fact that I have been quite pessimistic, in contrast with those around me, I still really didn't believe that we would still spend this day here and that this unfortunate war still would be claiming further victims. Thus today our thoughts are somber, we especially think of Poldi, from whom we haven't heard for such a very long time and we can only hope that the coming year will fulfill our wishes. That these wishes may soon come true is the biggest desire we have for the year 1945. I see myself as a living corpse. To die is easy, but to live and yet feel dead inside - that is difficult.

Jan. 6, 1945. Margret and the children moved today into my building and were allocated a privileged room. The extra food that I receive now and then is certainly very pleasing and welcome but also earned the hard way, because I have to labor strenuously and no consideration is given to my advanced age and my poor health. I rise at 5:30 a.m., have breakfast and start my work. Jenny gets up even earlier, turns on the oven, makes coffee and then can go back to bed for an hour waiting for the room to warm up a bit. It is very tiring to daily pound on, scrape and wipe the snow on the walk which has been worn and formed into a hard ice mass and it takes me hours and leave my hands numb. The heavy frost causes me to daily drag 30 kilos of coal from the cellar to my room on the 2nd floor.

Jan. 16, 1945. The German labor department has uncovered a large smuggle and trade operation of tobacco products and has arrested a number of people who were in possession of cigarettes. Before anything else, those arrested were beaten to a bloody pulp by the camp commander and the SS troops. Involved were about 20 men and women and one young man threw himself out of the window of the Dresden Barracks.

Punishment by the labor department was:

- 1) Until an explanation has been furnished in the ongoing investigation the entire recreational service and the cafe will not be operating.
- 2) Any sorts of extras will be stopped till further notice.
- 3) Going into effect immediately, no one allowed outside after 8 p.m.
- 4) All electric hot plates and heaters are to be turned in immediately.

If an explanation should not been forthcoming within 48 hours, the following further punitive measures will take effect: no lights, no fuel, and temporarily no food.

Jan. 18, 1945. Last night a very heavy air battle, like I have never experienced previously, took place very nearby. It took over half an hour and one could hear clearly the anti-aircraft guns and the falling bombs. Luckily for the entire settlement, several people involved in the tobacco smuggle came freely forward, whereupon the punitive measures were withdrawn. They are to be commended, because in coming forward freely they proved to be courageous, since they must have known that they would be severely punished. Afterwards we found out that they had been taken to the little fortress and had been shot.

Jan. 23, 1945. Like a thunderbolt out of a clear blue sky I found out tonight at roll call, that Block EIIIb, which includes my building, has to be vacated within 48 hours; seemingly they are expecting mixed marriage couples (Jews and non Jews) for whom rooms have to be made available.

Jan. 24, 1945. A month ago today we moved into our room and exactly one month later I receive notice to vacate it and to return to the Hamburger barracks. This pleasure didn't last long. It means for me that I have to give up my job and to make do without the extra food ration. I have mixed emotions, whereas Jenny is quite content. The extras and the own room were very pleasant, but in the long run I couldn't have kept up the heavy work without seriously ruining my health.

Jan. 27, 1945. Troublesome move to the Hamburger barracks with the help of a man and a wheelbarrow. Margret moved the day before. As a result of this mass relocation there is a lot of moving commotion and the congestion in the Hamburger barracks is frightening. Nevertheless I manage through connections to get relatively good accommodations.

Jan. 29, 1945. The doctor declared me unfit for work till Feb. 4th and I remain in bed and rest.

Feb. 2, 1945. To buy food at present is almost impossible. On the one hand packages don't arrive due to postal stagnation so that supplies are dwindling, on the other hand nobody wants to accept either German or Czech currency because it is predicted that soon these will be devaluated. It is a blessing that I got another food ration card from Margret, otherwise I would suffer terrible hunger pains. Wagonloads of sardines arrive via the Red Cross for the Jewish prisoners, but the Germans eat them all. The same goes for the many packages which arrive daily by mail. Only a small percent reach the addressee.

Feb. 3, 1945 I have been bedridden for 5 days, my hands and feet are still swollen, but I can't stand the bedbugs any longer. The question as to what they are planning to do with us when the hostilities are over, be it sooner or later, worries each and every one of us. Some people are of the opinion that they will still send us on to Germany before it is all over, others believe they will leave us here in peace in order to demonstrate how good the Jews were treated. Radical groups believe that at the last minute they will still liquidate us - that is kill us. It is in God's hands. We, 70 year

olds, have not much more to expect from life and whether we bite the dust a few years sooner or later is irrelevant. I only feel sorry for Heinz and his family. He still could accomplish so much. The new world would offer him great opportunities and he looked so much forward to the post war time.

Feb. 4, 1945. The day before yesterday 1,600 Jews from Prague, all mixed marriages, arrived here and rumor has it they have great news about the political situation. I am always very doubtful of such rumors, because I have been disappointed too many times. A man went from room to room, and summoned the parents of children under 14 years of age to report immediately to the barrack supervisor as the children will leave for Switzerland day after tomorrow and the parents are to accompany their children. This could be a possibility for Heinz.

Feb. 5, 1945. All Dutch people in my room were summoned at 3:30 o'clock at night with the order to prepare themselves for tomorrow's departure to Switzerland. That took care of the night's rest! People got dressed, visitors came from other rooms and it was as busy as a beehive. Later on it became known that the transport would consist of only 1,200 people and that stateless persons were excluded. Heinz didn't get a summons even though his Paraguay passport is being acknowledged. In front of headquarters a large mob is waiting for the inspection of their papers. Three thousand summons have been issued, but only 1,200 persons will participate of their own free will and not be forced as they have been on previous transports. A large portion, namely the Czechs, look at it with dubious eyes and refuse to take part.

Feb. 6, 1945. This night was just as cheerful as last night. Four of my Dutch roommates received the proper stamp in order to participate in today's transport and they are waiting to be summoned. They pack their belongings, talk loudly, their wives constantly enter the room and sleep was out of the question. Around 2 a.m. the summonses came and the upheaval really was set in motion. Only around 7 a.m. did those involve depart and it was quiet once again, but at that same time I had to get out of bed. The participants in the transport were not only well cared for at this end, but they also received plenty of supplies for the trip from the Jewish representative administration. The settling into the trains and the formalities took a long time because only at 3 p.m. did the long train start to move. Heinz is also ill since a few days, I hardly see him. It seems to be a head influenza and the doctor wants him to go to the hospital, which Heinz is resisting. I am exempt from work till Feb. 16 and am bedridden.

Feb. 9, 1945. Thank goodness, Heinz's health has improved and his temperature went down from 40.5C° to 38.7C° and no hospitalization has occurred.

Feb. 11, 1945. As of the 15th of this month all food rations will be reduced by 12-1/2%, a measure which will be implemented in the entire German republic. During the last days many mixed marriage couples arrived here from Prague and Germany. One of them told me that there are supposedly only about 1,000 Jews left in Prage and otherwise there are no Jews in the Protectorate (dependent country)

that live in freedom. He also told me that in Prague one could get hold of anything and everything, although it cost a great deal of money. A transport also returned from Zossen which had been sent there during the summer in order to build barracks. Taking this constant increase in population in consideration, one is expecting new transports to leave.

Feb. 14, 1945. Last night at 1 a.m. it was announced that it was no longer permissible to use water or electric light because there is trouble with the pipe lines. The water and electric works which service us have been bombed and are damaged. At night one could distinctly hear the falling of the bombs as well as the raging anti-aircraft guns. The shrinking of the food rations is already noticeable, mainly the bread rationing. Up to now we received 1/2 loaf every 3 days, which hardly was enough; now the same 1/2 loaf has to last 4 days and that means hunger. The hot meals also have become worse - in quantity and quality. We constantly get watery soup and 4 - 5 small boiled potatoes for lunch and at night imitation coffee.

Feb. 18, 1945. I don't like Heinz's health. He is constantly feeling weak, falls asleep whilst seated and what bothers me most, he has lost his will to continue. I hope that this weakness is only of temporary duration, but it is so unusual for him that I am worried. Constantly small troops arrive from the Republic and the Protectorate. Yesterday one from the Rhineland, today from Chemnitz and that one had to detour all the way via Bavaria because the railroad around Dresden is supposedly destroyed. A fire in the South barracks was the cause to generally forbid the use of any heat and since we have no lights in our quarters, resulting from a conflict with the house electrician, the situation is extremely unpleasant. The Hamburger barracks, also known as bedbug citadel, lives up to its nickname; there are so many bedbugs that we keep the light on at night in spite of the fact that it is strictly forbidden, hoping that the bedbugs and lice will be less aggressive when the lights are lit.

Feb. 21, 1945. Heinz got beaten today, without rhyme or reason, with a lead pipe by an SS man. There is nothing one can do except to grind one's teeth and to clench one's fist in fury.

Feb. 26, 1945. Today we are here one year! It's so easily said "one year"; however 12 months plus the 8 months in Westerbork makes 20 months altogether, living in captivity, suffering disappointments, deprivations and sorrows of all kinds, and not knowing what the future holds is difficult. When I look back over the past 20 months of our incarceration, I ask myself if it was worthwhile to be so miserable or would it have been better to end it all long ago. This question we have asked ourselves repeatedly, but the desire to see Poldi again determined again and again our will to keep going. The future looks very gloomy. If we survive the war we will be very poor and will not know how and where to live. To be kept by Heinz is an awful thought for me, aside from the fact that he himself has a family to take care of and doesn't know what his own future will hold. I can't count on friends and relatives, since they lost everything themselves due to the Nazi terror. The hope to see Poldi again keeps us going; long ago we gave up the hope to see Anne and Peter

again. I have to go on record though, that we have to thank Heinz for a lot, indeed for everything. If he hadn't cared for us in such an outstanding manner, we would have been dead and rotting somewhere in Poland a long time ago.

Feb. 28, 1945. As of tomorrow there will be no more additional food ration cards and that is hard for me, since I will have to do without the extras from Heinz - that is to say Margret. One has to tighten one's belt once again.

March 3, 1945. Just like last June, an international committee is supposed to come here again. In the streets, houses and rooms thorough cleaning is going on. The stores, which have been closed till now, are being decorated with the most attractive items and items which were never available and which even now are not for sale but only for show. Several homes for frail children are being opened in a hurry, in short, all preparations are being made to make a good impression.

March 8, 1945. Jenny sold her wrist watch today. The proceeds are 1 kilo margarine, 1 pound oatmeal and Mark 235- cash. It will be hard to barter with cash, nobody wants to sell food for money. I am now cut off from the outside world for more than 20 months and the historical events which have meanwhile taken place only come to me in terms of rumors. Hope and anticipation were so often a disappointment, that I don't believe any news anymore for a long time and I've become more and more doubtful. But during the last few days we received news from reliable sources, which was of such far reaching impact, that I can't deny the effects and start to believe again that the end of our suffering is in sight. If this hope again will be dashed into a disappointment, the result will be much more devastating than before, because I am at the end of my strength and nerves.

March 13, 1945. One inspection follows another and each time something else is being objected to, so that eventually one doesn't know what to do or not to do. It seems that important people are expected on whom one has to make a good impression, because the further development of the camp is dependent upon their opinions. But daily the food gets worse and the rations smaller. Bread is unavailable, even though M 40- is being offered; potatoes are also not available. In spite of that, each day we should be thankful to be here and thankful for our care because elsewhere conditions are still much worse. Two young women from Ravensbruck camp arrived here and told us about their experiences during their months long stay in that hell hole. Only because of their youth and their strong constitutions are they alive. Very many older women, including their mothers, died due to backbreaking labor, pitiful care and wretched treatment. Many were shot supposedly "during their escape". A coined phrase here says: We in Theresienstadt have it much better, we are not being killed immediately, but we are allowed to die slowly from hunger.

March 15, 1945. Wouldn't you know - in the midst of the preparations for the inspection today a long lasting severe fire erupted in the woodwork of the roof of the Hamburger barracks in which about 3,000 people reside. It looked dangerous,

but it was extinguished by the Jewish fire department with a fire engine. It will be quite an undertaking to make the building somewhat representable. Today I exchanged a can of milk, still from Amsterdam, for 4 kilos of potatoes. Jenny's attempts to try to exchange her beaver coat for nourishment was in vain. We live with the hunger pains as well as we can. Jenny weighs 79 pounds dressed.

March 18, 1945. The Hamburger barracks have been inspected by the camp commander and today the head of the Protectorate, Dr. Frank from Prague, arrived. The day after tomorrow we are expecting the international commission. When one walks today through the camp one can imagine being in a prospering community that knows neither distress nor misery. Not only the shop windows of the few stores, but also the windows of the street level apartments facing the road, are decorated with all sorts of things and it looks like everything is available here. To top it all is the newly created butcher shop window in which half a calf is displayed, flanked on one side by huge sausages and on the other side by a pyramid of cans with liver paté. That's how we live, that's how we live. That's how we daily live!! In one aspect, however, Theresienstadt is unique; it is the only city that doesn't have even one dog or cat. But that is no surprise. Since humans suffer from hunger, they cannot take care of pets.

March 21, 1945. Still no sign of the expected commission, but the window of the butcher shop, straight out of a fairy tale, is the delight of the camp inhabitants. Daily the window is being redecorated; today it contained hundreds of sausages, cold cuts, dried beef and corned beef and one questions the reason for this show and wonders who finally will eat all these items. The crowd in front of the butcher's window got so large that the Jewish police had to disperse the mob. Cigarettes go for M 12- per cigarette and whoever has cash tries to invest it in "fixed value" which are cigarettes, since they increase in price every week.

April 1, 1945. The commission is coming after all! Proof being the fact that suddenly today there was a change in the menu. We were supposed to get the usual watery soup with boiled potatoes, but instead we got a thick potato soup and barley rice. According to the efforts of the kitchen, it looks like the commission will remain for some time. The weekly menu, which was posted today, is sensational and was a cause for general joy because up to now we've never eaten so well.

April 3, 1945. A commission from Berlin, including a big shot, arrived yesterday; also Swiss Red Cross trucks with nourishment made an appearance.

April 6. Due to yesterday's arrival of a new commission, we received a festive meal such as never has happened previously in this community. At noon: soup, mashed potatoes and meat. At night: peas with sausage. Twice meat on one day! Jenny exchanged a raincoat for 10 kilos potatoes; I exchanged a brand new pair of pants for 3-1/2 loaves of bread. Yesterday the German agency issued an order that all backpacks are to be confiscated. Later it became known that those, as well as 5,000 more backpacks which were manufactured here, are to be used by Gentile refugees

who pass day and night in masses on the highway, and who are like rats deserting the sinking ship in order to save their skins in Germany. Much is going on. During the last weeks many Slovaks, Czechs and Hungarians have arrived; one hears more Czech and Hungarian spoken than German. The new arrivals for most part are not merely lower class people, but proletarians with Balkanian habits - a most unpleasant increase of population. I estimate the number of present Jews in the settlement at about 20,000.

April 12, 1945. The bread ration has decreased again and the grub, after the departure of the Swiss gentlemen, has become uneatable. The potatoes are rotten and stink. The 410 Danish Jews who are here are leaving and are being transported to Sweden by large busses. For them, for all intent and purposes, the war has ended, and us? Lately files are being constantly burned under auspices of the SS. Doubtless they do not want the enemy to get hold of them.

April 15, 1945. The Danes left today in 20 Swiss busses accompanied by officers of the Red Cross. Around 11 o'clock p.m. we were awakened by a messenger from the Jewish council with the news that tomorrow a very high ranking official from Berlin is expected and our barrack will be inspected. We are to transform our dreary abode into a jewel box.

April 16, 1945. Indeed, a representative of Himmler, by the name of Mueller, arrived but also an international commission comprised of one Portuguese, one Spaniard, one Swede and one Swiss agent (in other words, all neutral representatives). Seemingly our fates stand at a crossroad and definite decision-making discussions are being held. Outwardly these events were noticeable too, for instance, by a good noon meal consisting of vegetable soup, dumplings and hash. Furthermore, the crematorium has been transformed into a palm garden and the famous butcher shop is decorated with veal quarters and sausages.

April 17, 1945. Rumors fly, but facts about the discussions have not been substantiated. Only the no smoking ban, so strongly reinforced up to now, has been lifted; each heavy laborer is supposed to receive 3 cigarettes. The air activity today was very heavy. We practically had air raids all day long and one could clearly see innumerable Russian airplanes which flew very low and one could hear the bombs fall in the area. I observed an air fight and saw a German plane crash to the ground in flames.

April 18, 1945. Last night at 2 p.m. we were awakened by the news that the Germans are supposedly gone and we are supposed to be free. This caused great excitement and joy, the streets were full of people and all windows blazed with lights in spite of the severe ban and the night was turned into day time. But this elation was only of short duration, the official denial was issued and the directive given to immediately restore the old discipline. However, it took a while before everyone calmed down.

April 20, 1945. A transport of 1,700 people has arrived in the neighboring Bauschowitz and for the time being is in quarantine and supposed to be accommodated later in isolation at the bastion. A young boy, who escaped en route, told that the transport comes from Celle and has been on the road for 3 weeks. The largest part of the people have spotted fever. No need to import that; since some time it daily snatches several victims. Rumors trickle that near the crematorium gas chambers are being built and large amounts of prussic acid have arrived. Our gassing seemingly is facing us, but it is all the same to us whether we expire due to spotted fever or due to gassing. Our senses are so dulled that nothing can excite us anymore.

April 21, 1945. The transport that has arrived yesterday and today from Germany is the worst that we have seen so far and even the most vivid imagination can not hold a candle to the naked truth. It is almost impossible to describe the misery which could be seen up close and what these people have to tell is still much worse. They are dressed in rags, partly in torn prison garb, half dead of hunger and covered with bugs. They look like mummies and act like animals. A large number died en route and almost all of those that arrived alive had to be carried out of the train on stretchers. Even the surely not-so-soft-inclined German elements turned away in horror when the unloading took place. The new arrivals told that children under the age of 14 and people unable to work were gassed immediately at their arrival. The history of the unfortunate Jews that were shipped to Poland will still have to be written; we are part of this history at present and are horrified and retrospectively I can only see ghosts because only now I realize in what kind of danger we were hovering.

April 22, 1945. Day and night, with short intervals, new transports arrive constantly and bring unhappy people in a state which is difficult to describe. Today the survivors of camp Buchenwald arrived and their stories far outdid anything we had heard up to now in terms of atrocity. Most boxcars only contained corpses; the few survivors had to be taken away on stretchers. We, who have been isolated for such a long time from the rest of the world and who have had no idea of what is happening elsewhere, are being brutally awakened and we are discovering what the rest of the world probably knows all along - the demise of the Jews in Europe, produced and artfully staged by a nation which was previously known as the nation of thinkers and poets. Comparatively speaking, these crimes, committed to a people whose only fault is that they are Jewish, the inquisition, the Jewish programs and massacres of the middle ages were child's play and only after the war will the world find out about the enormous number of unfortunate human victims who fell prey to fanaticism as never before in history.

April 25, 1945. The Hamburg barracks are being emptied to accommodate the new arrivals. Once again a quick gathering of our belongings and a head over heels move into separate quarters. I share the room with 20 Slovacks and an indefinite number of bedbugs. One already has become accustomed to a lot of things, but this is new to me. The bread ration has been decreased again, it is now 170 grams or 2

slices per day. Six quarantine stations are now established, but the number of spotted fever incidents rises daily.

April 28, 1945. The Jewish alderman has announced that the German agency as well as the entire SS will leave Theresienstadt in the near future and that instead Czech government troops are to take over the guarding of the camp.

May 1, 1945. Even though this is May and springtime, it is so cold that I am wearing my heavy sweater and my wintercoat and I'm still freezing. Meanwhile, the number of Jewish inhabitants has risen to about 30,000.

May 4, 1945. The price of a loaf of bread is now M 80-. In the South barracks a small revolution took place today when the Poles, who reside there, tried to forcefully break out. The summoned O.D. troops and the fire department with pumper brought things under control, but at night the South barracks were engulfed in flames.

May 5, 1945. Early today it was announced that the war has ended and that we are free. Thousands of people poured into the streets, hoisted the Czech flag, sang patriotic songs and embraced each other in gladness. Many tore off the Star of David and a great mood prevailed, which was escalated when it became known that the Americans were approaching. In no time the German signs were removed, but no overt hostilities took place against the Germans. More than 1,000 Czech have already been amassed today, Czech police from Prague have arrived in busses and the new camp commander is a Czech. We now are officially under the protection of the Red Cross which has established its offices in the old commander's headquarters. We are being told that street fights are taking place in Prague, railroad traffic is at a standstill, and battles are still being fought in the Protectorate. The SS troops have quietly disappeared, censorship is no longer existent and newspapers are officially posted on billboards. The Jewish alderman has resigned and was replaced by a 3 man committee. The surviving martyrs of the little fortress have been transferred to here.

May 6, 1945. The Americans did not arrive, however they are supposed to be marching from Pilsen to Prague. Here we constantly see German tanks and cars driving towards direction Prague. Today again about 3,000 Jews have arrived here and more are expected.

May 8, 1945. The front must be near; heavy gun fire can be heard throughout the day and night - lovely music to our ears. The delegate of the Red Cross has resigned and has transferred the leadership to a Czech commissioner. The reason being, supposedly, that Theresienstadt is scheduled to be occupied by the Russians who do not acknowledge the Red Cross.

May 9, 1945. Last night, about 6 o'clock, a never ending column of trucks could be seen with escaping German soldiers; they threw various timebombs and hand

grenades which later exploded and cost several lives. Three hours later the first Russian tanks passed through, driving towards Prague, and they were greeted joyfully. I took off the Star of David which I had worn for 5 years. New transports with Jews still are constantly arriving, partly by rail and partly by foot, in deplorable condition. One sees people without shoes, feet wrapped in rags. Daily contamination danger is getting more likely due to the stream of the arriving masses of all sorts.

May 10, 1945. As of today a red flag with the Soviet star has been installed on the roof of the Jewish self administered bank building. A never ending column of trucks, cars, armored vehicles and all sorts of transportation with Russian soldiers flood the roads and they are throwing cigars, bread, cigarettes, chocolates and other delicacies in large quantities at us, causing scuffles between thousands of hungry Jews. An indescribable ecstasy of enthusiasm reigns. After years of being imprisoned and after years of all sorts of deprivation one feels free and one feels like a human being. The hidden SS troops are being hunted down and mercy on those that fall prey to their victims.

May 11, 1945. Still a stream of tanks, cars, trucks and horseback riders occupy the highway day and night, as of yet there is no end in sight. Last night I was in Leitmeritz and stopped on the way and brought back a backpack full of rhubarb, a welcome change of the monotonous diet. It was discovered from files that were found in the German agency that all Jews here were supposed to have been gassed in the next several days. If the Russians had arrived a few days later, we would not be living anymore. The plan to gas us was already in existence at an earlier date, but could not be implemented because at the time the doors of the gas chambers did not close tightly. I do without sleep, courtesy of the bedbugs; mostly I spend the nights sitting on a bench in the courtyard.

May 13, 1945. The promised improvement of our diet is in effect. Here is last week's menu:

	<u>lunch</u>	<u>dinner</u>
Sunday	Barley	Boiled potatoes
Monday	Boiled potatoes	Potato soup
Tuesday	Coffee, Barley	Potato soup
Wednesday	Boiled potatoes, hash	Barley soup
Thursday	Barley	Potato soup
Friday	Boiled potatoes	Barley soup
Saturday	Boiled potatoes, pie	Barley soup

Even though already several hundreds of cases of typhus patients have been removed, still over 1,000 typhus patients are remaining and a 14 day quarantine period has been ordered; all non-sick people under the age of 60 have to be available for public health inspection.

May 15, 1945. As of yesterday a public-announcement-radio-vehicle has been installed at the market place, which, aside from music also broadcasts news in the Czech language. One still can hear gun fire coming from skirmishes with SS formations who are still resisting. During the past days, the German military storage facility in Leitmeritz has been looted and enormous amounts of provisions and delicacies have been brought into the camp. The Slovacks, who share my quarters, brought me real coffee, bacon, dried prunes as well as smoking material, making me feel like King Croesus. In the room adjacent to Jenny two cases of spotted fever have been diagnosed, making communications with her increasingly difficult. Meanwhile the number of typhus cases has risen to 2,500 and there is a shortage of medication, doctors and staff. Daily the stay here becomes less comfortable and more dangerous.

May 19, 1945. Today, for the first time, I saw the tatoed number on the right arm of a man returning from Auschwitz; the sign of German barbarism.

May 20, 1945. During this week we had 9 times potatoes or potato soup and 8 times barley or barley soup, but only meat once. But the portions are bigger and one feels full. We now receive daily 230 gram bread versus only 170 gram in earlier days; but the bread is sometimes already moldy when we receive it and when one cuts off the moldy parts one doesn't have any more bread than one had earlier on. The same goes for the potatoes, which are getting progressively worse.

May 23, 1945. Finally an improvement is noticeable in the diet. We now receive 1/2 bread for 2 days, 125 gram margerine per week and we received a unique ration of 1.2 kilo white flour. That is thanks to the Russians who not only liberated us out of German hands, but who also look after our physical well being. The Russians are now on top of the situation and they are good organizers, although one also hears of serious attacks by Russian soldiers who rape women of all ages and who steal items of value, mostly watches, with pointed gun.

May 28, 1945. Gentile Germans - both male and female - work in the camp. They wear a swastika on their jackets, front and back, and their hair has been shaven on one side of their heads. Molestations and derisions, which occurred during the first couple of days, are forbidden. I remind myself of my intentions not to have pity in the hours of revenge; however, in spite of that I can't actively participate in these demonstrations and I stay on the sidelines.

May 31, 1945. As of today a daily transport leaves for Prague which takes the Protectorate inhabitants home. The camp is constantly getting emptier and is facing its disintegration.

June 2, 1945. Jenny and I are booked on the first Holland transport, yet it is not known when it will leave. However, I took us off the list because I want to start the return voyage together with the children. It is questionable if any or how much luggage one can take along because there is very little room.

June 5, 1945. Yesterday we were informed that French officers are arriving and that they will take along 750 people scheduled on the Holland transport. We all pack our things, (one suitcase to take along, the others for safekeeping in the Hannover barracks). And then, when we are done and are all set, we learn that the French gentlemen did not show up and that most likely the transport will leave tomorrow. During the afternoon the situation changed again, only native Dutch people (versus naturalized citizens and stateless German Jew's residing in Holland) are to go, the others have to wait. I took the stored items from the Hannover barracks back today and will send them by car to my nephew Hans in Prague when the opportunity arises. They will be safer there than here. However, that pleasure costs me K 2000-. Every camp inhabitant today received 2 eggs; they are the first eggs which I have eaten in 2 years. In the early evening I hear by chance that we have to appear with luggage at 19 o'clock and are supposed to be send off. Thus, quickly, we pack again and lug it to the assembly area. From there a troublesome march to the little fortress from where the transport is supposedly leaving. There we are informed that we have to leave the luggage and we ourselves have to turn back, since the transport is only scheduled to leave tomorrow. Thus back again to sleep in the old bed.

June 6, 1945. Got up at 5 a.m., assembled at 6 o'clock and again marched to the little fortress. There, firstly, people and their belongings were disinfected after which we got milk, sausage and bread and at 1 o'clock 500 of us were loaded into 24 Swiss trucks. Around 3 o'clock we were in Prague which had suffered little. Our group consisted only still of 12 vehicles, the others must have taken another route. After Prague we made a rest stop and were being taken care of. Everyone received 1/2 bread, 1/2 can of meat, a little margarine and sugar. I spoke to some Czechs and they presented me with cigarettes and cake. Around 17 o'clock we continued driving direction Pilsen and were caught en route by a severe thunderstorm with heavy rains. About 21 o'clock we arrived at Pilsen and stood for a long time on the open road because they couldn't find a roof for over our heads. But at last we ended up at midnight at Dobran, which is located 16 kilometers from Pilsen, and we were put up in the local insane asylum. Two women and 2 children are to share one bed and the men sleep on the floor; but it is spic and span clean and we have plenty of blankets.

June 7, 1945. The care is sufficient. In the morning they even serve sweetened coffee, a long missed treat. One can hardly imagine the size and beauty of the institution, built by the old Austrian aristocracy. The area is so enormous that it takes one hour from one end to the other and it accommodates 4,000 people. At the moment there are 1,800 people present, mainly evacuated gentile people from the Rhineland. The former members of the NSDAP have to wear yellow armbands. The stay here, after the long camp existence, is like the most beautiful summer vacation and has the advantage not to cost anything.

June 11, 1945. Today we were transported by American trucks to the air field near Pilsen, had to stand for hours out in the open while it poured and eventually did not fly due to bad weather conditions, but instead had to spend the night in an awful

barracks on the cold hard floor. All day we didn't receive any care whatsoever, only ate dry bread, and only in the evening we got some thin watery soup and a little canned meat. The day was as unpleasant as could be, but the evening turned out to be beautiful. Heinz and Margret had befriended two American soldiers who spent the late afternoon and evening, till past midnight, with us. They supplied us with excellent real bean coffee, white bread thickly piled with butter and cold cuts and brought us sugar, cocoa, chocolate, soap, cigarettes and even chewing gum. These two young boys treated us to the most beautiful evening to be experienced ever since the war broke out and we will always remember this night with happiness.

June 12, 1945. The weather continues to be bad and the planes which are supposed to pick us up do not show up. I'm hungry and search in the trash bins, located in front of the barracks of the American soldiers, for thrown out left over crackers and the likes.

June 13, 1945. It is one week today that we are on the road and it looks like we are going to have to wait much longer until we are home. We are all overtired and depressed; the weather is so horrible that we can hardly leave the barracks.

June 15, 1945. The days drag on forever, one is hungry and bored. I spent hours on the road looking for cigarette butts from the American soldiers. Today I was lucky and found 37 butts which equals 3 pipes for me. Heinz is impatient and wants to leave here; I am less enthusiastic to leave because in my experience, each time we change our stay, it is a change for the worse and I am quite sure that the biggest disappointment awaits us in Holland. Daily bread rations are getting smaller, yesterday we received one loaf (Kommisbrot = soldiers or ammunition bread) for 10 people. To protest this undignified treatment, we put back on the hateful Stars of David.

June 17, 1945. This morning we finally were picked up by 15 American trucks and two British busses and were driven to Bamberg. Once again no care given during our trip, it is hot and the trip is tiring. We traveled through Nurnberg and for us that was a sensation. This city, once so beautiful, is now an unimaginable heap of rubble, in the midst of which only here and there an undamaged house still stands. Neither pen nor illustration can depict it and if one hasn't seen it with one's own eyes any description would be deemed exaggerated. FOR THAT WE CAN THANK OUR FUHRER! We finally reach Bamberg at night at 19 o'clock and are put up in horse stables of the Ulanen barracks. In the city, occupied by English and Belgian troops, prevails an unbelievable hatred of anything German so that one only dares to speak German in low whispers. The accommodations, the conditions in the washrooms and latrines can not be described; we lose courage and are almost weary of living. In contrast, food allowances are good and plentiful and everyone even received cigars or cigarettes.

June 18, 1945. The night was horrible. After waiting for hours in the courtyard we were loaded at 19 o'clock and departed at 21 o'clock in cattle cars, each containing

40 persons. Sleeping was out of question, one could not stretch out and the many accompanying children provided diversion.

June 19, 1945. The voyage continues at 20 kilometers per hour, only we have to stop often and for long periods of time as all bridges and passes are damaged. It is very hot and care is non-existent. To travel the distance between Bamberg and Frankfurt, 26 hours are needed.

June 20, 1945. Two years ago, today, we were picked up by the "Green Police" and deported. What a multitude of experiences have we lived through in those 2 years! The continuation by train is getting worse; we are at a standstill in open country for hours on end and need a full day of traveling for the stretch Frankfurt - Mainz which barely took 45 minutes in earlier days.

June 21, 1945. Poldi's birthday! Does he know anything about us? We continually see ravaged towns, reach the Rhine and the war area where heavy fighting had raged. Bonn, Duren, Aachen are in ruins. At 15 o'clock we arrive in Maastricht (Holland) after a journey of 15 days and are treated royally with bread and an indefinable soup, which we chuck out. Then we continue on to Sittard, where we are supposed to be repatriated (resettled). There we are billeted in a school, the Dutch in better and the stateless in less good quarters. The food rationing is monotonous but sufficient.

June 22, 1945. All day long we stand with our luggage in the courtyard and don't know what will happen to us. On account of Heinz's South American passport he is part of the Dutch group and enjoys freedom of movement, whereas we may not leave the premises. For us, being stateless persons, it is unbearable that we are still being treated as prisoners and are still being guarded by armed soldiers. Once again, as a sign of protest, we put on our Star of David, but it doesn't help. Around midnight the order is issued to vacate the school. We march with our belongings to the cloister Leyenbrok, which has been equipped as a camp, and we sleep on straw mattresses on the floor. The cloister is surrounded by a huge garden, but entrance is forbidden. Of what use is a beautiful garden to me, when only others are able to stroll in it.

June 24, 1945. One is able to wash one self once again, one can undress at night and one is treated like a human being.

June 26, 1945. In the morning hours there were rumors that the men are to go to Valkenburg and are being separated from their wives; however, these measures are being withdrawn through the intervention of a Catholic priest.

June 30, 1945. Yesterday Heinz departed with the Dutch group for Amsterdam whilst we stayed back with the other stateless people, our destiny is still unknown. Will we be shipped to Germany or will we receive permission to enter Amsterdam?

July 3, 1945. Yesterday, once more, was a high point in my versatile existence and from now on I will celebrate July 2 as a holiday. In the afternoon my name was called and a stranger told me that he had good news for me. Slowly and carefully he prepared me for the fact that Poldi is here. I can not and will not attempt to describe the feelings that assaulted me when I saw Poldi, after 6 long years, dressed in an English army uniform, sitting with Jenny in the waiting room. We listened to his descriptions, his news about himself and his family and the hours flew by. His carressing his mother's hands said more than any spoken word can say - he has remained the same good boy and son that he always was. He also brought concrete things, like money, food supplies, chocolate and cigarettes; but we were not in the mood for material things and were only delighted to have him in person till evening time when he had to leave us temporarily. Through him I learned that my brother Camill and my sister Irma had often inquired about me and were in touch with Poldi. Poldi tried in vain to obtain permission for us to continue our voyage to Amsterdam and he had to abandon us to our fate. Whatever the outcome, whether we eventually have to return to Germany or whether we may enter the promised land, these two days spent with Poldi will never be forgotten.

July 8, 1945. Finally we have received permission to leave the cloister between 7 am and 11 pm and will, in the course of the next few days, begin the last phase of our travels - the trip to Amsterdam. I still fear that the greatest difficulties will be encountered at our destination.

July 10, 1945. We finally obtained permission to continue our travels and supposedly are to start the journey on July 13.

July 12, 1945. We rented a truck jointly with some other people and left this morning. It will always remain an unforgettable experience in what condition we arrived in Amsterdam - without money, without a roof over our heads, without knowing the whereabouts of Heinz - and nobody paid any attention to us. Through lucky circumstances we learned of Heinz's address and could sleep there for the first time in 2 years in a real bed. And thus ended our absence from Amsterdam for more than 2 years and our travel time of 36 days came to a halt, and we started the not-so-pleasant-stay in our so called "hometown" in which we suddenly had become "hostile foreigners". The apprehensions that I already had expressed in Theresienstadt that we would encounter still unpleasant surprises upon our return were mild compared to the realities, but that is a totally different subject matter.

APPENDIX

Oscar Lichtenstern (nickname Okki) married to Jenny Lichtenstern née Caro (nickname Muttchen).

Older son Leopold (nickname Poldi) lived in England at outbreak of war and was married to Anne. They had one son called Peter. Anne and Peter lived in New York at outbreak of war. Poldi and his family changed their name from Lichtenstern to Lister.

Younger son Heinz was married to Margret Lichtenstern née Spier. They had 2 children, the older Ruth (nickname Tutti) and the younger Robert (nickname Robbie)

Jenny Merzbach, aunt of Margret (Oscar's daughter-in-law) with whom Oscar and Jenny were close.

- K = Czech currency Krone
- M = German currency Mark
- Fl = Dutch currency Gulden
- C° = Celcius degrees

